



Character in leadership: Perceptions from intercollegiate athletics administrators

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Abstract

Despite the importance of leadership in sport organizations and the extensive research conducted in leadership, the construct of leader character has received less research attention. This study examined the prevalence, perceived importance, and perceived value of leader character within Canadian intercollegiate athletics administration. A total of 116 Athletic Administrators at every Canadian U-Sports member institution were contacted to participate in the study. Seventy-six administrators agreed to participate yielding a response rate of 65.5%. Leader character was measured using the Leader Character Insight Assessment (LCIA) consisting of 11 leader character dimensions. Overall, *Accountability*, *Integrity*, and *Drive* were the highest ranked leader character dimensions while the lowest ranked leader character dimensions included *Humility*, *Justice*, *Temperance*, and *Transcendence*. The participants also perceived that their universities valued leader character similarly to themselves. The understanding of leader character within Canadian intercollegiate athletics administration is advanced and the importance of leader character is discussed.

Keywords: leadership, character, Canadian sport administrators, intercollegiate athletics

Character in Leadership: Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics Administrators

The topic of leadership has been scrutinized for centuries and continues to capture the interest of researchers, theorists, and practitioners across multiple disciplines (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Northouse, 2015). A number of leadership scholars (e.g., Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2009) have chronicled the plethora of research findings pertaining to leadership in various comprehensive works. Exemplary of this research is Bass' (1990) text that draws from over 7,500 citations. Researchers in sport management have also actively pursued the topic of leadership over the past few decades (e.g., Burton, Welty Peachey, & Wells, 2017; Chelladurai, 1993; Danylchuk & Doherty, 1996; DeSensi, 2014; Weese, 1995). Several recent published materials (e.g., Scott, 2014; Welty Peachey, Damon, Zhou, & Burton, 2015) summarize the key findings of leadership research in sport management and substantiate the claim that leadership remains a prevalent research area in sport management.

Despite the extensive interest in leadership research in sport management, the aspect of leader character has received less attention. The study of leadership in sport management and in broader contexts has tended to focus on leader behaviour or "what leaders do" (e.g., Danylchuk & Chelladurai, 1999). Leader character, on the other hand, is more concerned about "who leaders are". Understanding leader character is important as the "who" will typically inform the "what" (e.g., Hannah & Avolio, 2011a). Often, leader behaviour is context specific and dependant on the type of situation (e.g., Fiedler, 1967), whereas character is not contextual, and refers to deep structures of personality and virtue that are particularly resistant to change (Hillman, 1996). Given that the character of the leader involves ethical and moral beliefs, intentions, and behaviours (Bass & Bass, 2008), and is linked to virtuous traits such as integrity, justice, and fairness (Hannah & Avolio, 2011b; Kilberg, 2012), character is a disposition or trait guided by a

1 set of principles, beliefs, or way of thinking, and thus will often inform the actions and
2 behaviours of leaders in difficult situations.

3 Although there has been increased attention given to the role of character in leadership,
4 minimal attention has been afforded to the topic in the administration of intercollegiate athletics,
5 which is the focus of this study. Kim (2009) noted that effective leadership was especially
6 important to overseeing intercollegiate athletics programs. However, much of the leadership
7 research in intercollegiate athletics has focused on leadership styles and behavior. Danylchuk and
8 Doherty (1996), for example, studied leadership at the Athletic Director level in Canadian
9 universities and found that transformational leaders were more effective in the role. Burton and
10 Welty Peachey (2013) suggested that servant leadership—a style of leadership that places a
11 heavy premium on leader character—has special application in the area of intercollegiate sport.

12 Bedi, Alpaslan, and Green (2016) highlighted the efficacy that servant leaders can have
13 on situations, such as increased ethical behavior of followers, increased honesty, heightened
14 effectiveness, and increased member satisfaction. Perhaps this type of leadership has special
15 utility in intercollegiate athletics given the prevalence of the publicized high-level ethical
16 breaches (e.g., Olympic Games, FIFA, Tour de France). Unfortunately, in recent years, unethical
17 behavior in sport organizations has grown to be a norm, much less a rarity (Burton et al., 2017).
18 Universities and colleges are not immune to ethical breaches either as many examples can be
19 drawn from both American and Canadian settings. In the United States, ethical breaches in the
20 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) include point shaving scandals, recruiting
21 violations, and inappropriate booster contributions, which highlight the fact that ethical
22 misconduct is prevalent in intercollegiate sport. Recent transgressions in U SPORTS, the
23 governing body for intercollegiate sport in Canada, has seen a wide array of ethical issues, such

as eligibility fraud, doping, and sexual assault allegations. These ethical transgressions further highlight the need for strong, character-based leadership in intercollegiate athletics programs as well, and have garnered the attention of several researchers (e.g., Burton & Welty Peachey, 2014; DeSensi, 2014; Pfleegor & Seifried, 2016; Roby, 2014; Sagas & Wigley, 2014; Staurowsky, 2014; Walker, Seifried, & Soebbing, 2018).

The connection between leadership and ethical climate is important to understand (Burton et al., 2017). The character of leaders cascades into those they lead (Sosik, 2006). Thus, the most important role of leaders is to shape and embed a desired culture for the group they lead. As noted by DeSensi (2014), emphasizing the welfare of the followers (i.e., athletes and employees), servant leadership is congruent with the moral values and helps athletes understand the importance of developing values, which in turn, attribute to character. DeSensi (2014) called for a moral imperative that must be addressed in intercollegiate athletics that relates to ethos, character, and values. She further noted: “The journey to moral excellence in intercollegiate sport is paramount for the sake of the individuals it directly serves, the student-athletes.” (p. 63). Specific to character, DeSensi advocated for character education to be considered in the ethos of intercollegiate sport.

As with any organization, the need for strong executive leadership is paramount. Kim (2009) highlighted this fact in noting that leadership makes a difference in running intercollegiate athletics programs. Consistent with the focus of the present study, Elza (2014) also suggested that running a successful program requires ethical behavior (i.e., character). Intercollegiate sport is educationally-based, and should reflect the highest levels of integrity and ethics (Chelladurai, 2007; Rieke, Hammermeister & Chase, 2008). Therefore, leader character is a critical component to the leadership in intercollegiate athletics.

To accomplish the mission of their respective athletics programs, one would believe that effective leadership from the Athletic Director is critical. Organizations reflect their culture, and according to Schein (1990), the most important role of an executive leader is to embed a desired culture for an organization. Contemporary researchers have thus turned their attention to the cognitive approaches to leadership (e.g., authentic leadership, servant leadership, emotional intelligence). Leader character forms an indisputable aspect of these models of leadership. As a result, researchers (e.g., Seijts, et al., 2015; Sosik, 2006) have acknowledged the role of character in leadership. To date, minimal attention has been attributed to the role of character in leadership within intercollegiate athletics administration, which served as a catalyst for the current study.

Purpose

The purpose of the current study was to examine the concept of character in leadership within Canadian intercollegiate athletics programs. Specifically, the present study investigated the leader character of Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators (i.e., Athletic Directors and Associate Athletic Directors/Coordinators) using the Leader Character Insight Assessment (Seijts et al., 2015).

Review of Literature

Theoretical Background of Character in Leadership

Hackett and Wang (2012) suggested that the most recent theoretical developments in leadership (e.g., servant leadership, transformational leadership, visionary leadership, and charismatic leadership) are based on elements of leader character. Recent developments in servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Hammermeister, Burton, Pickering, Chase, Westre, & Baldwin, 2008), which places the interests of followers before those of the leaders (Sendjaya, 2015), underscores and emphasizes the role of character in leadership and leadership

effectiveness (Brooks, 2015; Gandz, Crossan, Seijts, & Reno, 2013; Hu & Liden, 2011; Seijts, Gandz, Crossan, & Reno, 2015) and thus provides a useful theoretical framework for the current research.

The role of character in servant leadership has been advanced by several authors. Bennis (1989) discussed vision, inspiration, empathy, and trustworthiness as key character aspects that effective leaders possess. Spears (2010) outlined ten characteristics of servant leaders that integrate many elements of character as well (e.g., empathy). Kouzes and Posner (1993) asserted that credibility (i.e., honesty, trustworthiness, and a knowledge of the task at hand) was essential to leadership, while Covey (1991) highlighted the importance of honesty and ethics to leadership. Findings from a meta-analysis (Bedi, Alpaslan, & Green, 2016) reinforced the role that character and ethics occupies in leadership. The meta-analysis revealed that the ethical behavior of leaders is significantly and positively related to the ethical behavior of followers, increased incidence of honest behavior, heightened citizenship behaviors, higher levels of job satisfaction, and increased effectiveness in their roles.

Burton, Welty Peachey, and Wells (2017) also noted a positive relationship between servant leadership/ethical climate and leader trust/procedural justice. These researchers and others (Seijts, 2014; Seijts et al., 2015) have explained the importance of character to the leadership role and its centrality to leader outcomes, such as member and group satisfaction and performance. Sosik (2006) suggested that character is critical to the function of leadership, and Avey, Luthans, Hannah, Sweetman, and Peterson (2012) advanced that character, coupled with leadership behaviour, can result in higher unit performance. Researchers are continually producing findings that highlight the important role of character in leadership demonstrating the interconnectedness of character and competence in leadership (i.e., Crossan & Mazutis, 2008;

Crossan, Mazutis & Seijts, 2013; Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013; Sturm, Vera, & Crossan, 2017).

Leader Character Framework

The current study utilized the Seijts et al. (2015) Leader Character framework, which includes 11 different leader character dimensions, along with associated elements for each dimension (i.e., virtues, personality traits, and/or values). The framework was developed by conducting research with business professionals who were asked how character influenced their business decisions, and what character meant to them (Crossan et al., 2017; Seijts et al., 2015). Various literature bases that had previously examined the concept of leader character were also considered (e.g., anthropology, business, education, philosophy, psychology, sociology). Experienced practitioners and students from leadership backgrounds all contributed to the framework (Seijts et al., 2015).

In attempts to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, Crossan et al. (2017) incorporated a three-phase, multi-method approach to further understand the perceived impact of leader character on sustained excellence within organizations. Using qualitative interviews focused on defining leader character (Phase 1), quantitative online questionnaires focused on the importance of each of the leader character elements (Phase 2), and lastly, a 360-degree approach to rating leader character within business organizations (Phase 3), Crossan et al. (2017) collected data from 1,817 different business professionals to further refine the leader character framework and operational definition.

The 11 dimensions of the leader character framework include: *Accountability, Collaboration, Courage, Drive, Humanity, Humility, Integrity, Judgment, Justice, Temperance,*

1 *and Transcendence* (Seijts et al., 2015). The elements within each dimension, while not
2 exhaustive, are illustrative of their respective dimensions.

3 *Accountability* refers to the leader's sense of ownership. Effective leaders will recognize
4 their responsibilities and fulfill their duties, while at the same time avoid burnout. Elements of
5 accountability include: *accepts consequences, conscientious, responsible, and takes ownership*.

6 *Collaboration* is a necessity for effective teamwork. It includes the elements of being
7 *collegial, cooperative, flexible, interconnected, and open-minded*. Collaborative leaders are able
8 to effectively work within groups both internally and externally.

9 *Courage* involves the willingness to take risks (albeit calculated risks). Being *brave*,
10 *confident, determined, resilient, and tenacious* are all elements of this dimension of character.
11 Failure to display *Courage* results in mediocre decision making. On the contrary, foolish risk-
12 taking can result from excessive display of *Courage*.

13 *Drive* is present in leaders who are eager to succeed and not afraid to fail. Problems are
14 met head on with an urgency to solve the task at hand. The elements of *Drive* include:
15 *demonstrates initiative, passionate, results-oriented, striving for excellence, and vigorous*.

16 *Humanity* is the mindfulness of others and is represented in a leader who is
17 *compassionate, considerate, empathetic, forgiving, and magnanimous*. Contrary to
18 misconceptions, displaying *Humanity* is not a sign of weakness for a leader. It is a leadership
19 strength and is fundamental to good character. It aligns well with emotional intelligence.
20 Fostering relationships with followers may not be critical for effective management; however, it
21 is critical for effective leadership.

22 *Humility* is another essential dimension of character, as it allows the leader to learn from
23 mistakes (both individually and from the mistakes of others). A leader with *Humility* is a

1 *continuous learner, curious, grateful, modest, reflective, respectful, self-aware, and vulnerable.*

2 However, it is important not to lean too far on the other end of the spectrum, as this can impact a
3 leader's confidence and belief in his/her abilities.

4 *Integrity* in a leader can be seen through the elements of being *authentic, candid,*
5 *consistent, principled, and transparent.* *Integrity* is about knowing oneself, and having high
6 moral standards. Speaking one's mind and following through with those statements are also
7 components of *Integrity*. One potential issue with *Integrity* is being excessive in leading to self-
8 righteous behavior and less effective leadership. However, many would argue that one could
9 never have enough *Integrity*, and that the benefits much outweigh the disadvantages.

10 *Judgment* acts as the centerpiece for the framework. The initial framework positioned all
11 11 dimensions surrounding the centre piece of "Character" (Crossan et al., 2017). Following
12 revisions, the framework was adapted to have the dimension of *Judgment* as the centrepiece,
13 with the other 10 dimensions surrounding it. This is fitting, given the demonstration of *Judgment*
14 can be illustrative of a person's overall character. It reminds us that leadership is a situational
15 process, requiring different perspectives from the leader in different settings. It is the mediator
16 for the other ten dimensions' impact on behavior. The elements of *Judgment* include being
17 *adaptable, analytical, cognitively complex, critical thinker, decisive, insightful, intuitive,*
18 *pragmatic, and situationally aware.*

19 *Justice* is a dimension highly responsible for the followers' choice of whether to accept
20 the leadership being provided. Elements of *Justice* include being *equitable, even-handed, fair,*
21 *proportionate, and socially responsible.* One would suggest that leaders not displaying these
22 qualities will quickly lose their credibility and any influence they possess over the followers.

1 *Temperance* is present in leaders who are *calm, composed, patient, prudent, and self-*
2 *controlled*. When faced with decision-making pressures, *Temperance* allows the leader to assess
3 situations carefully and rationally. On the contrary, a lack of *Temperance* can lead to rash risk
4 taking. It is important the leaders understand the consequences of their decisions.

5 *Transcendence* is seen in leaders who are *appreciative, creative, future-oriented, inspired,*
6 *optimistic, and purposive*. Effective leaders focus on the future and sustained success of the
7 organization. They envision where the group is wanting to go and focus on the big picture as
8 opposed to just short-term gains. Displaying *Transcendence* does not mean a search for
9 perfection, nor does it shy away from short-term goals. It is simply focused on the future
10 possibilities of the group.

11 Practitioners and business professionals understand the importance of character in the
12 organization; however, the actual number working to heighten their character rating, and linking
13 character to leadership efficacy, may be comparatively low. Seijts et al. (2015) attribute this gap
14 to three issues. The first is the definition of character and the commensurate uncertainty and
15 inconsistency of the application of the concept across disciplines (i.e., what it means, its
16 dimensions, how it can be developed and accessed). In comparison to competencies (that have
17 strong support in academic and practitioner literature) and commitment (that has a fairly straight
18 forward meaning), character vocabulary is not as well understood. This ties into the second issue,
19 which takes the ambiguity of the definition a step further, but also emphasizes the need for
20 practice-focused vocabulary. Lastly, the systematic assessment for character is difficult, due to
21 the limited number of reliable measurement tools available. Seijts et al. (2015) indicated the need
22 for comparative studies to be completed in different organizations across different leadership
23 levels. One cannot assume that the results in one domain are generalizable to another. Canadian

intercollegiate athletics presents an ideal paradigm for a comparative insight of leader character in sport management and expands on the literature base focused on ethical leadership in intercollegiate athletics in the American context (e.g., DeSensi, 2014; Burton & Welton Peachey, 2014; Sagas & Wigley, 2014).

To that end, this study focused on intercollegiate sport in Canada, which has a rich history dating back to 1906 (Gage, 2001). Currently, the U SPORTS organization is responsible for 56 Canadian universities and over 14,000 student-athletes (U Sports, 2020). They are led by individuals who have job titles such as Director of Athletics or Director of Sport and Recreation, and also have fiduciary responsibilities for campus recreation programs (e.g., intramural sports, fitness, aquatics). Most programs typically have one or more Assistant/Associate Director(s) or Coordinator(s) who serve as the second in command. These administrators generally oversee large complements of coaches and support staff.

The following three research questions were addressed using the Leader Character framework:

RQ 1: What leader character dimensions are most prevalent amongst Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators?

RQ 2: What leader character dimensions do Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators believe are the most important to their program's effectiveness?

RQ 3: What leader character dimensions do Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators believe are the most valued by their University in their programs?

Method

Research Instrument

The current study utilized the Leader Character Insight Assessment (LCIA; Seijts et al., 2015). The questionnaire contains 62 items (character elements) that assess 11 character dimensions (*Accountability, Collaboration, Courage, Drive, Humanity, Humility, Integrity, Judgment, Justice, Temperance, Transcendence*) with responses provided on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (extremely unlikely) and 5 (extremely likely). The instrument has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of leader character in previous research (Crossan et al., 2017; Seijts et al., 2015). Crossan et al. (2017) stated that the development of the LCIA was not to treat character like other personality constructs and seek to establish specific factor structures or discriminant validity between dimensions, but rather to “identify the interconnectivity between the dimensions and elements while also identifying meaningful differences between the dimensions and elements that can serve both theory and practice” (Crossan et al., 2017, p. 8). Due to this objective, the LCIA was our measure of choice for leader character for this study.

The survey package for the current study consisted of two parts—Section A included three questions pertaining to character in leadership and Section B included demographic information questions. The three questions in Section A focused on the prevalence, perceived importance, and perceived value of leader character from the athletic administrators’ point of view. As previously mentioned, a five-point Likert-type scale was utilized for the first part of Section A that incorporated the 62 character elements from the LCIA. Participants were asked to identify the prevalence of each statement in regard to how they perceive themselves to be engaging in those behaviors in their intercollegiate athletics programs (1= Extremely Unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Neither Unlikely nor Likely, 4 = Likely, 5 = Extremely Likely). The second

question asked the participants to rank order each of the 11 leader character dimensions of the LCIA according to what they believed was most important to their intercollegiate athletics program's effectiveness (1 = most important, 11 = least important). The third question asked participants to rank order the value they believed their University places on each of the 11 leader character dimensions of the LCIA with respect to leading an intercollegiate athletics program (1 = most valued, 11 = least valued). Section B asked participants demographic questions pertaining to gender, position, and years of experience as an intercollegiate athletics administrator.

Participants

The study participants consisted of intercollegiate athletics administrators at Canadian universities within the U SPORTS organization (58-member institutions at the time of the study), the governing body for intercollegiate sport in Canada. Within each member institution, an Athletic Director and an Associate Athletic Director/Coordinator are present. Therefore, a total of 58 Athletic Directors and 58 Associate Directors/Coordinators could be surveyed within the U SPORTS Organization (i.e., a total of 116 potential study participants). Out of 116 possible respondents, a total of 76 responded yielding a 65.5% initial response rate. Of these 76 respondents, 15 cases had to be deleted due to extensive missing and incomplete data, leaving a final sample of 61 participants (52.5% completed response rate). The sample consisted of Athletic Directors (n = 36), Associate Athletic Directors/Coordinators (n = 23), and undisclosed (n = 2), from the 58 member institutions within U SPORTS (n = 45 males, n = 14 females, n = 2 undisclosed). Participants had a combined total of 446 years of experience in their current position and an average of 7.57 years in their current position, and a combined total of 786 years as intercollegiate athletics administrators with an average of 13.33 years.

1 **Procedure**

2 Following university ethics approval, the 116 Canadian intercollegiate athletics
3 administrators (58 Athletic Directors and 58 Associate Athletic Directors/Coordinators) were
4 emailed and invited to participate in the study. Administrators were presented with a standardized
5 recruitment script requesting participation in the study, a Letter of Information outlining the
6 study, and an online survey link taking the administrators directly to the study portal where each
7 administrator was invited to complete the questionnaire package. Data were collected over a
8 four-week period with an initial invitation email and two follow-up reminder emails. Those who
9 did not reply after four weeks were not further pursued and data collection ceased. Responses
10 were collected electronically using Qualtrics and data were transferred into SPSS for analysis.

11 **Data Analysis**

12 The first research question (RQ 1) focused on the prevalence of leader character amongst
13 the participants. The data were organized into the 11 leader character dimensions where the
14 means, standard deviations, and frequencies were computed for each dimension. A series of
15 paired samples t-tests assessed for significant differences between the means of each dimension.

16 The second research question (RQ 2) pertained to the participants' assessment of which
17 leader character dimensions were the most important relative to program effectiveness.
18 Participants rank-ordered (i.e., 1 = most important, 11 = least important) the 11 character
19 dimensions and the mean, median, and mode of the rankings were tabulated. A lower median and
20 mean score for the rankings indicated a dimension that was more important, and vice versa.

21 The third research question (RQ 3) pertained to the leader character dimensions that the
22 participants believed their University valued the most with respect to leading an Intercollegiate
23 Athletics Program. Participants rank-ordered (i.e., 1 = most important, 11 = least important) the

11 character dimensions and the mean, median, and mode of the rankings were tabulated. A lower median and mean score indicated a dimension that was more valued, and vice versa.

Results

Prevalence of Leader Character Dimensions

Table 1 reflects the overall means, standard deviations, and frequencies of the 11 leader character dimensions and the associated elements. *Accountability*, *Integrity*, and *Drive* were rated the highest, whereas *Humility*, *Justice*, *Temperance*, and *Transcendence* were rated the lowest.

Differences in Leader Character Dimensions

Table 2 reflects the 19 significant differences between the means of the prevalence of the leader character dimensions for the intercollegiate athletics administrators. Given the 11 dimensions in the LCIA, there were 55 comparisons assessed, and significant differences between dimensions were considered at the $p < .001$ level. This more conservative p value was used for significant values to guard against Type 1 error based on the Bonferroni correction calculation ($.05/55 = .0009$).

Importance of Leader Character Dimensions

Table 3 depicts rankings for leader character dimensions based on importance. Overall, the participants ranked *Integrity* as the number one leader character attribute for program effectiveness followed by *Drive* and *Accountability*. Conversely, *Temperance* was ranked as the least important for program effectiveness.

University Value of Leader Character Dimensions

Table 4 depicts rankings of leader character dimensions based on perceived value to the university. Overall, the participants felt their universities most valued *Accountability*, *Integrity*,

and *Collaboration* for leading their respective athletic programs. Conversely, they felt that their universities least valued *Temperance* for leading their athletic programs.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the concept of character in leadership within the setting of Canadian intercollegiate athletics, specifically, the leader character of Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators, the perceived importance (to program effectiveness), and perceived value (to the university). The LCIA, which includes 11 character dimensions, was utilized as the research instrument. The current study sought to build on previous work conducted on leader character within the organizational literature (Avey et al., 2012; Seijts, 2014; Seijts et al., 2015; Crossan et al., 2008; Crossan et al., 2013; Crossan et al., 2017), and extend the findings to the sport management literature within the setting of Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators.

Prevalence of Leader Character

The character dimensions of *Accountability*, *Integrity*, and *Drive* scored the highest for prevalence by athletic administrators. These findings are consistent with those of Crossan et al. (2017) and Seijts et al. (2015), who found that business leaders in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors rated *Drive*, *Accountability*, and *Integrity* as the most beneficial dimensions for leader effectiveness. The culture of Canadian intercollegiate athletics is student-athlete focused (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013; Danylchuk & Doherty, 1996; Doherty, 1997; Elza, 2014). Although competitive, the stakes are not as high in Canada compared to American intercollegiate athletics (e.g., no lucrative television contracts, no large sponsorship and endorsement arrangements, no extensive ticket revenue) (Danylchuk & MacLean, 2001). Likewise, within the culture of accountability and integrity, Canadian Athletic Directors self-report integrity breaches

(e.g., eligibility infractions, recruiting violations, performance-enhancing drug offences) to league officials and data are shared at league-wide meetings. An institution's ranking of number of Academic All-Canadians (student athletes who attain an 80% academic average or above) are celebrated on Canadian university campuses as much or more than a national championship. Therefore, it is not surprising to see *Accountability* and *Integrity* emerge as prevalent character dimensions when leading a Canadian intercollegiate athletics program.

Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence were the dimensions that scored the lowest by the participants in terms of prevalence. Crossan et al. (2017) and Seijts et al. (2015) also reported low scores for the dimensions of *Humanity, Humility, Temperance, and Transcendence* in terms of their contributions of leader performance outcomes. Given that these are two sample groups from different leadership settings (i.e., business professionals versus intercollegiate athletics administrators), perhaps parallels can be drawn between the overall impact of leader character on organizational performance. It can be argued that these results are also impacted by the nature of sport, and in particular, Canadian intercollegiate athletics. One of the inherent values of sport is the norm for productivity and exhibiting maximal individual effort (Gammage, Carron, & Estabrooks, 2001). Thus, certain character elements associated with certain dimensions are not typically a part of the high-performance sport culture. As such, one might expect to see certain character dimensions embraced over others by intercollegiate athletics administrators. Working in a culture where scores, standings, and statistics are tracked and monitored, embracing character dimensions such as *Accountability* and *Drive* make intuitive sense. Coaches and athletes also do their best to defeat their opponents during competitions, but do not necessarily possess a win-at-all-costs mentality in the spirit of maintaining integrity. However, due to the culture of competition, high performance sport does not always embrace

elements of being equitable, fair, or proportionate (e.g., playing time is not evenly distributed but based on skill and ability). As such, dimensions such as *Humility*, *Justice*, *Temperance*, and *Transcendence* were consistently rated at the bottom end of the prevalent character dimensions in intercollegiate athletics.

Perceived Importance and Perceived Value of Leader Character Dimensions

To examine leader character in another way, participants were asked to rank order the 11 character dimensions in the LCIA. The addition of two ranking questions (one for administrators' perception of importance and one for administrator's perception of the value to their University) provided more insight into the perceptions of leader character for Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators. Many of the findings were consistent with the prevalent character dimensions; however, slight differences were observed as well. The means from the 11 character dimensions provided an independent examination into the dimensions. That is, the participants rated each statement independently. The rank-order questions allowed the participants to compare the dimensions against one another. By considering multiple methodologies and interpretations of the data analysis (i.e., rating and ranking), unique variances in participant responses were uncovered that may have gone unnoticed with the traditional independent assessment of each dimension (i.e., *Accountability* had the highest mean, but *Integrity* and *Drive* had the highest rankings). Researchers should consider multiple methods of data analysis and interpretation to uncover a richer return of results. Without consideration of alternative methods of data analysis in asking the participants to rank the dimensions, in addition to obtaining mean scores, the current study would have been more limited in the conclusions that were advanced.

1 **Implications for Sport Management Research**

2 Several key implications from the current study can be drawn for individuals occupying
3 intercollegiate athletics administrative roles. Firstly, it is essential that leaders within the
4 intercollegiate athletics environment possess *Accountability* and *Integrity*. Not only do
5 administrators believe these dimensions are important to sustained program effectiveness, but
6 they also believe that these dimensions are highly valued by their Universities. For success in
7 intercollegiate athletics, administrators must be cognisant of what their university values as well
8 (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013; Burton et al., 2017; Chelladurai, 2007; Danylchuk & Doherty,
9 1996; Doherty, 1997; Elza, 2014; Kim, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Parris & Welty Peachey,
10 2013; Rieke et al., 2008; Welty Peachey et al., 2015). Therefore, individuals who possess these
11 traits should continue drawing upon them within their workplace, and administrators who
12 currently do not always focus on accountability or integrity should most definitely work to draw
13 on these aspects in their leadership.

14 Secondly, it should be noted that each of these dimensions ideally work in unison and
15 collectively contribute to effective leadership. Different settings will require different leadership
16 strategies to be drawn upon. Within the setting of Canadian intercollegiate athletics
17 administration, *Temperance* does not seem to be as prevalent or as important for sustained
18 program effectiveness. The same can be said for the perceived value of what universities are
19 concerned with at their institutions. Therefore, the elements that make up transcendence, such as
20 developing patience, having a calm and composed demeanor, exhibiting self-control, and acting
21 prudent, should not be the primary areas of focus for leader character in intercollegiate athletics
22 administrators. Rather, these administrators need to be focused on exhibiting a responsible,
23 conscientious work ethic, having the ability to accept consequences, owning up to their mistakes,

leading in consistent and authentic manners, expressing morally sound principles, and remaining transparent to their employees (i.e., the elements of a leader displaying high levels of *Accountability* and high levels of *Integrity* in their leadership). Burton and Welty Peachey (2013) believe that servant leadership, which as mentioned above, is reflected in the concept of leader character, is a strong fit with sport management leaders. The findings of the present research offers empirical support for that claim.

A third implication resides with the similarities between the values of intercollegiate athletics administrators and academic institutions in regard to leader character. The participants believe that *Accountability*, *Integrity*, and *Collaboration* are essential character traits for effective leadership. Similarly, participants also believe that *Temperance* is of less importance for effectiveness. This indicates that intercollegiate athletics administrators are making efforts to align with what is important to their Universities. For growth within the intercollegiate athletics department, administrators must ensure their visions align with those of the University. Results also indicated that administrators were more concerned with *Drive*, and that they felt Universities were more concerned with *Justice*. This makes some sense given the microscopic lens under which the Universities operate. Academic institutions must present themselves in a fair, equitable, proportionate, even-handed, and socially responsible institution (i.e., display the elements of *Justice*). Administrators, on the other hand, are more than likely concerned with results and vigor (i.e., win/losses, national championships, Academic All-Canadians, etc.).

For sustained excellence in the role, leaders should acknowledge that every industry is different. There is no reason to believe their leader character demands will not differ as well (i.e., the differences between intercollegiate athletics leaders versus corporate business leaders, as mentioned above). We know that coupling character with leadership can lead to improved unit

performance (Avey et al., 2012). We are also seeing decreased focus in the literature on traditional styles of leadership (Burton et al., 2017). Understanding what one's industry requires in terms of leader character is essential for development, and more so, sustained excellence in the role. Addressing one's deficiencies, and continuing to draw from well engrained aspects of leader character could prove very beneficial for leaders of all industries, not just those situated within sport management. Furthermore, incorporating a servant leadership approach may improve the application of the leader character dimensions, thereby enhancing leader and unit performance.

A final point of discussion pertains to the language and labels used in the LCIA. Different individuals in different settings will interpret the elements and dimensions according to their own lived experiences. For example, certain leaders might struggle with the element of *vulnerability* in the *humility* dimension when trying to demonstrate strength in a position of leadership. Likewise, certain elements may be interpreted differently or not as readily understood. As Crossan et al. (2017) highlight, many of the character elements are commonly used in organizational mission statements and codes of ethical conduct and thus are more easily understood and trigger positive familiar responses. In contrast, other terms may be less utilised or not as familiar and thus may not be as valued by one individual in one setting.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations to the current study that should be addressed. First, generalizability of the results are limited to the specific sample of Canadian intercollegiate athletics administrators who were targeted to participate in the study. Although a response rate of 65.5% is laudable in most studies, the raw number of participants (N = 76) was limited due to the finite number of individuals who comprise the roles of intercollegiate athletics administrators in Canadian U SPORTS organizations (i.e., 58 member institutions, 116 administrators). Further,

1 data from 15 participants were unusable due to incomplete/missing data and were thereby
2 eliminated from the analysis. Future research could expand the scope to a broader sample (e.g.,
3 Canadian Community College Athletics), which may provide further insight into leader
4 character. Although there was a finite number of potential participants for our study, future
5 research could also enhance such a sample by having Senior Academic Administrators (e.g.,
6 President, Provost) from each university report the value their institution places on the different
7 dimensions of leader character. This could offer a comparative analysis for the discussion
8 surrounding what the athletics department deems important, and what the University values.

9 Another limitation to the current research pertains to the self-report nature of the data. As
10 indicated in the methods section, participants used self-report measures (i.e., online survey) to
11 assess their personal view of the value and importance of 11 leader character dimensions. This
12 type of research relies on participants providing honest and accurate feedback about their leader
13 character, which lends itself to social desirability and self-presentation bias. Some may
14 misinterpret or embellish their character ratings as often happens in leadership research (Weese,
15 1995, 2000). Future research may also consider a 360 approach (i.e., LCIA 360), a measure
16 designed to enhance the self-report feedback by comparing it with multiple perspectives (i.e.,
17 direct/indirect reports, colleagues) (Crossan et al., 2013). This could offer a comparative analysis
18 between what administrators feel they reflect in their leadership, and what their subordinates
19 believe their leaders actually demonstrate. Ultimately, this could help researchers understand
20 whether intercollegiate athletics departments are more effective when leaders are aligned on
21 character values.

22

23

1 **Conclusion**

2 The results of the current study add to the literature base on the importance of character
3 in leadership within the management of intercollegiate athletics and provide current and aspiring
4 sport leaders with insights on the character elements important to maximize effectiveness in
5 these leadership roles. This topic of research is warranted in sport management given the
6 established importance of leadership and the prevalence of ethical breaches that have transpired
7 in professional and intercollegiate sport. It is important that the next generation of leaders for
8 these programs are mentored by high character leaders to ensure the sustainability of principled,
9 ethical sports programs (Elza, 2014).

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Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Frequencies of Character Dimensions

Character Dimensions Associated Elements	Overall Mean M (SD)	1 (Extremely Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	2 (Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	3 (Neither Unlikely or Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4 (Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	5 (Extremely Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4+5 Frequency (Percentage)
Accountability	4.6967 (.35)						
Accepts Consequences	4.80 (.40)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (19.7%)	49 (80.3%)	61 (100%)
Takes Ownership	4.62 (.55)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	19 (31.1%)	40 (65.6%)	59 (96.7%)
Conscientious	4.60 (.56)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	20 (32.8%)	38 (62.3%)	58 (95.1%)
Responsible	4.77 (.43)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (23.0%)	46 (75.4%)	60 (.98.4%)
Collaboration	4.4525 (.35)						
Cooperative	4.65 (.52)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	19 (31.1%)	40 (65.6%)	59 (96.7%)
Collegial	4.51 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	30 (49.2%)	31 (50.8%)	61 (100%)
Open-minded	4.48 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	27 (44.3%)	31 (50.8%)	58 (95.1%)
Flexible	4.32 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	35 (57.4%)	22 (36.1%)	57 (93.4%)
Interconnected	4.33 (.63)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (8.2%)	30 (49.2%)	25 (41.0%)	55 (90.1%)
Courage	4.5541 (.38)						
Brave	4.57 (.78)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	19 (31.1%)	40 (65.6%)	59 (96.7%)
Determined	4.68 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	17 (27.9%)	42 (68.9%)	59 (96.7%)
Tenacious	4.53 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	26 (42.6%)	33 (54.1%)	59 (96.7%)
Resilient	4.52 (.65)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	2 (3.3%)	22 (36.1%)	35 (.57.4%)	57 (93.4%)
Confident	4.50 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	26 (46.6%)	32 (52.5%)	58 (95.1%)

Character Dimensions Associated Elements		Overall Mean M (SD)	1 (Extremely Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	2 (Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	3 (Neither Unlikely or Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4 (Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	5 (Extremely Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4+5 Frequency (Percentage)
Drive		4.5869 (.36)						
	Passionate	4.57 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	26 (42.6%)	35 (57.4%)	61 (100%)
	Vigorous	4.33 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	20 (32.8%)	37 (60.7%)	57 (93.4%)
	Results-Oriented	4.48 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	29 (47.5%)	30 (49.2%)	59 (96.7%)
	Demonstrates Initiative	4.67 (.47)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (32.8%)	41 (67.2%)	61 (100%)
	Strives for Excellence	4.67 (.51)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	18 (29.5%)	41 (67.2%)	59 (96.7%)
Humanity		4.4393 (.35)						
	Considerate	4.37 (.52)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	36 (59%)	23 (37.7%)	59 (96.7%)
	Empathetic	4.47 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	28 (45.9%)	30 (49.2%)	58 (95.1%)
	Compassionate	4.46 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	33 (54.1%)	28 (45.9%)	61 (100%)
	Magnanimous	4.48 (.60)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	25 (41.0%)	32 (52.5%)	57 (93.4%)
	Forgiving	4.43 (.53)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	32 (52.5%)	27 (44.3%)	59 (96.7%)
Humility		4.4403 (.36)						
	Curious	4.20 (.63)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.6%)	38 (62.3%)	18 (29.5%)	56 (91.8%)
	Self-Aware	4.38 (.76)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	1 (1.6%)	27 (44.3%)	30 (49.2%)	57 (93.4%)
	Modest	4.38 (.61)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.6%)	29 (47.5%)	27 (44.3%)	56 (91.8%)
	Reflective	4.11 (.84)	0 (0%)	4 (6.6%)	6 (9.8%)	30 (49.2%)	21 (34.4%)	51 (83.6%)
	Continuous Learner	4.74 (.48)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	14 (23.0%)	46 (75.4%)	60 (98.4%)
	Respectful	4.72 (.52)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	13 (21.3%)	45 (73.8%)	58 (95.1%)
	Grateful	4.62 (.52)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	21 (34.4%)	28 (62.3%)	59 (96.7%)
	Vulnerable	4.62 (.52)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	21 (34.4%)	38 (62.3%)	59 (96.7%)

Character Dimensions		Overall Mean M (SD)	1 (Extremely Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	2 (Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	3 (Neither Unlikely or Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4 (Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	5 (Extremely Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4+5 Frequency (Percentage)
Associated Elements								
Integrity		4.6459 (.31)						
	Authentic	4.61 (.49)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (39.3%)	37 (60.7%)	61 (100%)
	Candid	4.80 (.40)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (19.7%)	48 (78.7%)	60 (98.4%)
	Transparent	4.58 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	25 (41.0%)	35 (57.4%)	60 (98.4%)
	Principled	4.78 (.45)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	11 (18.0%)	48 (78.7%)	59 (96.7%)
	Consistent	4.48 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	27 (44.3%)	31 (50.8%)	58 (95.1%)
Judgment		4.4467 (.27)						
	Situationally Aware	4.55 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	27 (44.3%)	33 (54.1%)	60 (98.4%)
	Cognitively Complex	4.49 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	29 (47.5%)	31 (50.8%)	60 (98.4%)
	Analytical	4.43 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	34 (55.7%)	26 (42.6%)	60 (98.4%)
	Decisive	4.35 (.58)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	33 (54.1%)	24 (39.3%)	57 (93.4%)
	Critical Thinker	4.40 (.59)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	33 (54.1%)	26 (42.6%)	59 (96.7%)
	Intuitive	4.15 (.58)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	3 (4.9%)	42 (68.9%)	14 (23%)	56 (91.8%)
	Insightful	4.36 (.55)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	35 (57.4%)	24 (39.3%)	59 (96.7%)
	Pragmatic	4.47 (.50)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	32 (52.5%)	28 (45.9%)	60 (98.4%)
	Adaptable	4.77 (.42)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (23%)	47 (67%)	61 (100%)
Justice		4.2852 (.38)						
	Fair	4.67 (.48)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (32.8%)	40 (65.6%)	60 (98.4%)
	Equitable	4.35 (.58)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	36 (59%)	23 (37.7%)	60 (98.4%)
	Proportionate	4.23 (.76)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	38 (62.3%)	20 (32.8%)	58 (95.1%)
	Even-handed	4.05 (.62)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (16.4%)	37 (60.7%)	13 (21.3%)	50 (83.3%)
	Socially Responsible	4.15 (.69)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (16.4%)	31 (50.8%)	19 (31.1%)	50 (83.3%)

Character Dimensions Associated Elements		Overall Mean M (SD)	1 (Extremely Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	2 (Unlikely) Frequency (Percentage)	3 (Neither Unlikely or Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4 (Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	5 (Extremely Likely) Frequency (Percentage)	4+5 Frequency (Percentage)
Temperance		4.2426 (.49)						
	Patient	4.03 (.90)	0 (0%)	5 (8.2%)	8 (13.1%)	27 (44.3%)	20 (32.8%)	47 (77.0%)
	Calm	4.11 (.84)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	9 (14.8%)	27 (44.3%)	22 (36.1%)	49 (80.3%)
	Composed	4.32 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	37 (60.7%)	21 (34.4%)	58 (95.1%)
	Self-Controlled	4.43 (.74)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	25 (41.0%)	32 (52.5%)	57 (93.4%)
	Prudent	4.33 (.54)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	36 (59.0%)	22 (36.1%)	58 (95.1%)
Transcendence		4.4945 (.41)						
	Appreciative	4.58 (.53)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.6%)	23 (37.7%)	36 (59.0%)	59 (96.7%)
	Inspired	4.53 (.62)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (6.6%)	20 (32.8%)	36 (59.0%)	56 (91.8%)
	Purposive	4.43 (.76)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	4 (6.6%)	21 (34.4%)	34 (55.7%)	55 (90.1%)
	Future-Oriented	4.55 (.57)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	23 (37.7%)	35 (57.4%)	58 (95.1%)
	Optimistic	4.48 (.60)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.9%)	26 (42.6%)	32 (52.5%)	58 (95.1%)
	Creative	4.40 (.67)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (9.8%)	24 (39.3%)	30 (49.2%)	54 (88.5%)

Table 2.

Significant Differences Among Leader Character Means

Character Dimensions	Means
Accountability > Collaboration	4.6967 > 4.4525
Accountability > Judgment	4.6967 > 4.4467
Accountability > Justice	4.6967 > 4.2852
Accountability > Temperance	4.6967 > 4.2426
Accountability > Transcendence	4.6967 > 4.4945
Collaboration > Justice	4.4525 > 4.2852
Courage > Justice	4.5541 > 4.2852
Courage > Temperance	4.5541 > 4.2426
Drive > Judgment	4.5869 > 4.4467
Drive > Temperance	4.5869 > 4.2426
Integrity > Collaboration	4.6459 > 4.4525
Integrity > Humanity	4.6459 > 4.4393
Integrity > Judgment	4.6459 > 4.4467
Integrity > Justice	4.6459 > 4.2852
Integrity > Temperance	4.6459 > 4.2426
Humility > Justice	4.4403 > 4.2426
Humility > Temperance	4.4403 > 4.2426
Transcendence > Justice	4.4945 > 4.2852
Transcendence > Temperance	4.4945 > 4.2426

Note. $p < .001$

Table 3.

Rank Scores Based on Importance to Program Effectiveness

Character Dimension	Mean Rank (SD)	Median Rank	Mode Rank (Frequency)
Integrity	2.56 (1.86)	2	1 (26)
Drive	3.90 (2.68)	4	1 (15)
Accountability	4.02 (2.44)	4	2 (20)
Collaboration	4.49 (2.32)	4	3 (13)
Judgment	5.39 (2.62)	5	5 (13)
Courage	6.84 (2.72)	7	7 (12)
Humanity	7.18 (2.63)	7	7 (11)
Humility	7.38 (2.98)	8	11 (11)
Transcendence	7.59 (2.91)	8	11 (13)
Justice	7.70 (2.78)	8	8 (14)
Temperance	8.95 (2.12)	8	11 (16)

Table 4.

Rank Scores Based on Perceived University Value

Character Dimension	Mean Rank (SD)	Median Rank	Mode Rank (Rank Frequency)
Accountability	2.68 (2.06)	2	1 (23)
Integrity	3.02 (2.36)	3	1 (23)
Collaboration	4.86 (2.05)	4	2 (18)
Judgment	5.10 (2.53)	5	4 (10)
Justice	5.32 (2.29)	5	4 (12)
Drive	6.20 (2.51)	6	6 (12)
Humanity	6.98 (2.47)	7	9 (13)
Humility	7.38 (2.98)	9	9 (14)
Transcendence	8.20 (2.27)	9	11 (17)
Courage	8.24 (2.81)	9	11 (16)
Temperance	8.34 (2.41)	9	10 (18)